



# Northern Idaho ground squirrel

## *Spermophilus brunneus brunneus*

### STATUS

Threatened (65 FR 17779; April 5, 2000)

### DESCRIPTION

Idaho's only indigenous mammal, the northern Idaho ground squirrel, is smaller than most squirrels at about 6"-8" long. Reddish-brown spots dot its coat, and the squirrel has a short, narrow tail, tan feet and ears, and a grey-brown throat. This rare squirrel needs large quantities of grass seed, stems and other green leafy vegetation to store body energy for its eight-month hibernation from August through March. Adult males (2 years old) emerge from their burrows first in early spring, usually March or early April, followed by the females and then their young.

### HISTORY

In 1985, scientists estimated that over 5,000 ground squirrels inhabited west-central Idaho. The animals occurred in open meadows and shrub/grasslands among coniferous forests of older Ponderosa pines and Douglas fir.

### DISTRIBUTION

The northern Idaho ground squirrel's population has been greatly reduced, and today it is found within 20 square miles of public and private lands near Council, Idaho. At high risk of extinction, this animal has suffered a 92% decline in population from 1985 to 1999. Fewer than 400 northern Idaho ground squirrels are estimated to be living at present.

### WHAT HAS THREATENED THIS SPECIES?

The major threat to the northern Idaho ground squirrel is habitat loss due to conifer invasion and fire suppression. Other potential threats include agricultural land conversion, urban development, recreational activities and naturally occurring events such as severe droughts lasting longer than three years.

### WHAT IS BEING DONE TO HELP RECOVER THIS SPECIES?

A Conservation Agreement between the Payette National Forest and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was signed in 1996. It set a course of action for the two agencies to develop and implement a habitat conservation plan and a population monitoring strategy. Five sites were selected where intensive habitat modifications have been implemented on Forest Service lands. This helped to stimulate a collaborative effort, led by federal and state agencies, private land-owners and university research scientists, resulting in the development of a comprehensive conservation strategy for the northern Idaho ground squirrel. This strategy aims to reduce threats to the squirrel and implement habitat restoration methods at known population sites, including timber harvests, controlled burning and native vegetation restoration. In a major effort to prevent extinction of the squirrel, experimental translocation and monitoring of the animals will continue, on private and public lands.

### REFERENCES

USFWS and USFS. 1996. Conservation Agreement: *Spermophilus brunneus brunneus*.

Sherman, Paul W. and Eric Yensen. 1997. *Spermophilus brunneus*. In *Mammalian Species*, published by the American Society of Mammalogists.

Yensen, Eric. 1980. Population Status of the Idaho Ground Squirrel.

